

## Birthday Wish

by Jordanna Morgan

Category: Fullmetal Alchemist  
Genre: Family  
Language: English  
Characters: Alphonse E., Edward E., Maes H., Nina T.  
Status: Completed  
Published: 2016-04-11 02:40:59  
Updated: 2016-04-11 02:40:59  
Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:08:54  
Rating: K  
Chapters: 1  
Words: 1,739  
Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)  
Summary: Ed finds a creative interpretation for Al's birthday wish.

## Birthday Wish

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><strong>Archive Rights:<strong> Please request the author's consent.  
  
><strong>RatingWarnings:\*\* G.  
><strong>Characters:<strong> Alphonse, Edward, Hughes, Nina.  
  
><strong>Setting:<strong> During the Elrics' time studying with Shou Tucker.  
><strong>Summary:<strong> Ed finds a creative interpretation for Al's birthday wish.  
><strong>Disclaimer:<strong> They belong to Hiromu Arakawa. I'm just playing with them.  
><strong>Notes:<strong> Written for the prompt word "Wish" at Fan Flashworks. This story is notable for being my one hundredth "Fullmetal Alchemist" fic.

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><p>"So what do you want for your birthday, Al?"<p>

Alphonse Elric sighed within his empty steel shell. It must have been the tenth time his brother Edward had asked that question in the last three weeks, but Al still didn't have an answer for itâ€"and by this time, he was getting just a little tired of having to respond with vague evasions like \_I don't know\_ or \_Nothing special\_.

On the practical side of things, it wasn't as if Al had a need or even a \_use\_ for birthday gifts. Food and clothing were irrelevant for a living suit of armor; and now that they had left Resembool for

a rather unpredictable life of State Alchemy studies in Central, he had neither the time nor the place for other sorts of amusements a boy his age might enjoy. Books were always welcome companions during his wakeful nights, of courseâ€ but those he could simply borrow from the vast Central Library, which contained more than he could read in a lifetime. Besides, he didn't want to clutter the home of their host, Shou Tucker, with anything more than necessities.

And apart from thatâ€ Al didn't particularly care to be reminded that his birthday was coming up.

In another week, he would be turning twelve: two years older than he had been when his body was consumed in their forbidden transmutation. His eleventh birthday had gotten lost somewhere in the general chaos that was so often their lives now, but he hadn't minded. He didn't want to be left thinking about how much time he had lost within his unfeeling armorâ€ nor did he want Ed to dwell on that. Brother was already driven enough by the motivation to restore Al's body and his own limbs. It made him do reckless things, and that worried Al.

Furthermore, without a living body that he could see gradual changes in, it was sort of hard to feel like he was growing older at all. He knew he had matured in unfortunate ways on the inside, as he and Ed faced the consequences they had brought upon themselves by their sin, but that wasn't quite the same. On the outside, his armor was immutably inert, and he wondered at times if that would keep other things about him from changing. If he couldn't physically experience puberty and the hormones that came with it, could he still grow emotionally and psychologically in the ways a normal boy should?

Perhaps he would still go through that process one day. Even if it took them a long time to recover his flesh and blood, perhaps they would find it unchanged since the day it was taken from him. Perhaps he would have to grow up twice, his mental and physical maturation separated by an untold number of years.

He didn't want to think about that, any more than he wanted to think about remaining as he was forever. Because, either way, he didn't want to see Brother grow old without him.

It was simply better to wait, all things considered. Ifâ€no, when they got his real body back, he could have a birthday celebration big enough to make up for every year he had missed. Until then, all he wanted to focus on was living the best life he could in his current formâ€

And trying to keep Brother from getting himself killed.

"Hey! Did you hear me, Al? I asked what you wanted for yourâ€"

With an exasperated huff, Al abruptly turned to look down at Edward beside him. His answer this time was impulsive and impatient.

"What I want is just to see you safe and happy for once, Brother!"

Ed's eyebrows hiked up over wide golden eyes. His breath escaped in the funny little noise he made on occasion when they were sparring,

and Al had accidentally hit him too hard in the stomach.

He said nothing after thatâ€¦ but there was a thoughtful look on his face for the rest of the day.

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><p>On the morning of Al's birthday, Edward made no comment about the occasion. Al was astonished at thatâ€¦and really not displeased. He was glad if Ed had taken to heart his wish not to make a big deal of it.<p>

However, at the end of breakfast with the Tuckers, Ed leaned over toward their host's young daughter.

"You'd better run upstairs and get dressed, Nina." He turned to look at Shou Tucker, who was lost in a snowdrift of scientific notes at the end of the table. "Major Hughes will be coming by to take us out for the day. Do you mind if Nina comes along?"

Tucker mumbled a distracted assent. Al was sure he hadn't even heard the question.

Satisfied, Ed pushed away from the table, and started toward the kitchen with his dishes; but Al caught up with him in two strides, seizing him by the automail shoulder. "Brother, what are you up to?"

"Guess you'll just have to see." Ed grinned up at Al. "Don't worry. You'll like it."

Al released Ed, his spiked shoulders slumping. So after all his hints that he didn't want a fuss over his birthday, Ed had gone ahead and plotted something anywayâ€¦which meant Al would just have to bear with whatever the day held. He didn't want to disappoint Brother by appearing to be unhappy, even if he wasn't eager for a celebration.

Major Maes Hughes arrived shortly thereafter, smiling and conspiratorial. He drove the Elrics and Nina to an older, more modest neighborhood, ten minutes away. The destination he pulled up to was a gray house with a broad front porch and a spreading oak tree in the front yard.

"Here we are!" he announced cheerfully.

With some effort, Al managed to suppress the troubled frown that wanted to leak into his tone. "Soâ€¦ what are we doing here?"

"Oh, just a little community work." Hughes cheerfully lifted Nina out of the back seat. "Come on."

Hughes led the three children up the neat flagstone walkway to the porch, where he rang the doorbell. As they waited for an answer, Al studied the surroundings for some clue as to who might live there. The yard held little in the way of landscaping, but there was a wooden rocking chair on the porch. There were also a few bowls of water and dry kibble of some sort, which Al surmised were meant for pets.

After a somewhat lengthy interval, the front door was opened partway by a little, gray-haired old woman—and two cats darted out between her ankles, chasing each other into the yard.

"Good morning, Mrs. Krimm!" Hughes said brightly. He gestured to the elder of the Elric brothers. "I'd like you to meet Edward Elric. I think the two of you spoke on the phone a few days ago, right?"

Ed smiled at the old lady in turn. "It's nice to meet you. We're here for what we talked about. This is my friend Nina—" He gestured to the little girl beside him—and then to Al. "And my brother Alphonse."

Mrs. Krimm peered up at Al through her spectacles, her very blue eyes widening.

"Oh my—" she murmured in wonder. However, she quickly glossed over her surprise with a warm smile. "Well, hello there! Come in. You're just in time, and I'm always happy for any help my old bones can get!"

She shuffled away from the door, leaning on a cane. With a grin, Hughes herded his three young companions into the house after her—and Al saw \_cats\_.

There were several of them. Al counted seven in the front sitting room alone: big ones and little ones, young and old. Three kittens who must have been born in the same litter looked up drowsily from a padded basket. A large orange tomcat glowered down from a cat tree that nearly reached to the ceiling, and a silky white longhair lounged on a windowsill. A calico sauntered over boldly to circle Nina's legs, making the little girl laugh—and then to arch against Al's greaves, her purr vibrating through his hard steel.

Poleaxed, Al looked at the ridiculously self-satisfied grins on the faces of Ed and Hughes.

"The Major told me about Mrs. Krimm," Ed explained. "She's kind of known for rescuing strays, and taking care of them until she can find new homes for them. But she can't move around as easily as she used to, so she appreciates it when people can come help her. And when Hughes told me how he found those kittens and brought them here—well, I thought maybe this was how you'd like to spend the day!"

If Al had possessed physical eyes, they would have been goggling.

"\_Brother\_," he whispered—and then, when words failed him, he simply pulled Ed into a near-literally crushing hug. He was aware that Hughes looked on with a broad smile, although Nina was already oblivious. She was on her knees, her attention fully taken up with petting the calico.

Chuckling, Ed pulled away to catch his breath. He looked up at Al with warmly earnest eyes.

"You said you wanted me to be safe and happy for the day," he reminded his brother gently. "I can't think of anyplace I'd be much \_safer\_ than a nice old lady's house—and if playing with these cats makes you happy, then \_I'm\_ happy, Al."

For a moment, Al hovered on the brink of a tremendous outburst of sentiment; but he was spared when Mrs. Krimm reappeared in the kitchen doorway, brisk and cheerful.

"It's almost feeding time. Who would like to help?"

Giggling brightly, Nina rose to run after the old woman. Alphonse followed her with a laugh of his own, feeling Brother's contented gaze on him as he lumbered off into the kitchen.

All things considered, his birthday wish had turned out to be the best one he could have made.

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